

# TB ...still a major public health threat in South Carolina

**"Although tuberculosis is a preventable and curable infectious disease, it is the largest single cause of death in the world, killing about, 2,000,000 people every year."**



***A major problem in controlling tuberculosis is that many patients fail to take their medication as prescribed. In South Carolina, health department TB nurses spend a majority of their time helping patients take their medicines correctly. This is one of the major reasons for the continued decline of South Carolina's cases of tuberculosis.***

**A**lthough many people think tuberculosis (TB) is an illness of the past, the disease, remains a major public health threat in South Carolina. In 2010 the state has the 15th highest case rate in the nation, with an average of 175 new cases of TB being reported annually to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environment Control.

Some 2,000 TB infected individuals (persons who have positive TB skin test), receive preventive treatment every year so that eventually they will not become active cases. Annually, an additional 100 persons are examined and treated as suspected cases until tuberculosis can be ruled out.

## **TB germs are transmitted through the air**

Tuberculosis is a major public health problem because it is transmitted from person to person through the air. The only way to get the disease is to inhale the germs coughed out by the infectious person, not by drinking or eating after the person. It is contagious and usually takes long, close contact over a period of time with someone who has unsuspected tuberculosis of the lungs. TB, though not just a lung disease, can affect any part of the body.

## **Individuals with symptoms should be tested**

General symptoms of TB may include feeling weak or sick, weight loss, fever and night sweats. Symptoms suggesting TB of the lungs may include a prolonged cough, chest pain and/or coughing up blood. Other symptoms depend on the particular part of the body that is affected.

When tuberculosis is suspected, a TB skin test or blood assay should be given to see if TB germs are present in the body. A positive test must be followed-up by other tests to determine if the TB infection has progressed to active



disease. Individuals who believe that they have been exposed to tuberculosis, or who are experiencing symptoms, should call their county health department or their private physician.

For the past decade, tuberculosis cases have been declining slightly, with the lowest number of cases ever reported in 2010, at 153. This number indicated a 9% decrease from the number in 2009 which was 164.

South Carolina cases have been declining because of intensified efforts to control the disease by DHEC staff as well as private practice physicians and other health care professionals. Recent challenges in treating TB have been drug resistant strains in which the usual TB medicine will not work. Treating this type of TB is medically difficult and expensive requiring more funds and nursing time to treat the disease.

While tuberculosis is a disease of all ages, races, sexes and social classes, the majority of tuberculosis patients in South Carolina are black males, between 25 and 64 years of age.

About one person in 10 infected with the tuberculosis germ develops active disease. This can happen a few months after infection occurs or may not happen for years or decades after the original infection.

A major problem in controlling tuberculosis is that many patients fail to take their medication as prescribed. In South Carolina, health department TB nurses spend a majority of their time helping patients take their medicines correctly and consistently. This is one of the major reasons for the continued decline of South Carolina's cases of tuberculosis.

Since TB is a communicable disease, there are no eligibility requirements for patients to receive treatment, prevention or control services.

Services provided by DHEC include:

- evaluation, diagnosis, medications, directly observed therapy (DOT), and medical management for persons diagnosed with TB infection and/or TB disease to assure completion of adequate treatment;
- approved hospital care for the medically indigent;
- social work services;
- development and enforcement of regulations to protect the public.

#### **For More information:**

DHEC TB Web Page:

<http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/tb/>

CDC:

<http://www.cdc.gov/tb/>

or call your local county public health department.



South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

*We promote and protect the health of the public and the environment.*

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